

Striking resident doctors speak out from picket lines across England

“We no longer just have a winter crisis, it’s a crisis all year round”

Our reporters
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Resident doctors in the National Health Service (NHS) spoke with *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) reporters on the picket lines at hospitals around England on Wednesday at the start of their latest strike.

WSWS reporters distributed the article “Resident doctors strike goes ahead in England defying Labour Health Secretary ultimatum”, describing the government’s latest empty “offer” as a ploy to either secure strikers’ surrender or brand their action “self-indulgent, irresponsible and dangerous”, as health secretary Wes Streeting said Monday.

The offer’s overwhelming rejection was an indictment of the British Medical Association (BMA) Resident Doctors Committee (RDC) decision to even put it to members in the first place.

Bournemouth Hospital

Ania said, “I’m an F2 [Foundation Year 2] and there’s a real fear about unemployment after F2. I’ve applied for training but when I started medical school the competition ratios for what I want to do were probably less than two to one and now it’s at least eight-and-a-half to one to even get a place. I have a real fear that I’m not going to have a job next year.

“Most people don’t realise that you do this medical degree and you think that you’ve got good career progression but actually 30,000 people are applying for 10,000 spaces and so 20,000 of those people might not have a job or might not have a job in something that they would like to do and progress in their career.”

London St Thomas’ Hospital

GP trainee **Uzayr Undre** said the offer from the government “wasn’t a pay offer. It’s a dispute about pay with an offer which had no pay in it.” He added, “Full pay restoration is not about an increase in pay, it’s about getting back to how doctors were valued in the past.”

“A lot of the language Wes Streeting has used over the past couple of days has been very inflammatory.” Streeting was trying to claim “we’re both too valued to not go to work, but we’re not valued enough to pay us fairly.”

“I did my F1, F2 in a small hospital in Scotland where there were about 50 people. About six of us have gone into training posts, including myself. The rest are picking up shifts where they can, and a lot of them have gone to Australia and New Zealand.”

Nischa added, “If you lose the doctors, you will lose your NHS.”

Resident doctor **Kruthika** opposed how Streeting cynically used understaffing to attack the strike: “What he’s portraying to the public is that understaffing exists only during strikes, but we are understaffed all the time. That is because there’s not enough of us, doing more jobs than we’re supposed to do.”

Manchester Royal Infirmary

Dr. Good, a resident doctor for five years, said “We are still paid 20 percent less than people with our jobs were in 2008 and there’s still not enough doctors in jobs to see patients.

“Streeting offered us nothing on pay. We are not worth less than we were 17 years ago, right?”

“An F1 doctor, a doctor starting off, is paid less than £19 an hour. We are asking an F1 to be paid about £22, £23 an hour, because that’s pay restoration.

“They’re often the first person showing up to a crash call. They’ll be seeing patients directly from A&E. They’ll be dealing with you on the wards, following the consultant’s plans, making sure that you are looked after on the wards.

“All the people who work in the NHS—the porters, the nurses, the radiographers—they’re all on less pay than they should be on given the service they do.”

Sheffield Royal Hallamshire Hospital

Chris, a newly qualified resident doctor, said, “The government’s attacks on the strike are a bit disgusting. Look at Wes Streeting and [Prime Minister] Keir Starmer’s arguments; they say they want to work with us and then in the same article say you’re being reckless and any deaths that occur during the strike are on you.”

John, a resident doctor working in psychiatry since 2017, said, “All public sector workers, and all workers have noticed a pinch, especially recently. During COVID we had a pay freeze. I have a student loan, which is more than £50,000, which comes out of my pay every month.”

On the government’s plan to prioritise UK graduates for jobs he answered, “There are not enough jobs for resident doctors and they’re facing competition for those jobs. What the right solution is, I don’t know, because we must respect the international medical graduates. They are a massive part of why the NHS functions and contribute an awful lot.”

Mary, a paediatric doctor said, “Pay erosion means people are struggling to afford things like childcare and it’s hard for single parents. Families are having to make decisions about whether to send their children to childcare or work less than full time.

“The government has not taken us seriously. They’re not listening to what we want, putting half-baked offers on the table. We are so passionate about patients being safe and this is not something that we would do unless we were sure that it was for the long-term benefit of the patients and of the NHS. There’s been a chronic lack of funding for the NHS for years.”

Dr. Wilson, who works in paediatrics, said, “We’ve got a huge unemployment crisis with resident doctors. Doctors are leaving for Australia and some even depend on Universal Credit [welfare benefits].

“Mr. Streeting’s proposals don’t address this; they only create 1,000 extra jobs and these are conversions from jobs that already exist. We need thousands more jobs to ensure that doctors aren’t facing unemployment.

“When people talk about the difference in workloads

between 20 years ago and now, they don’t understand how different the landscape is. We’re just facing a totally different landscape of unwell people. People are chronically ill, critically ill, and people are living longer in poor health.

“We can work up to 72 hours in a week sometimes where we’re non-stop on our feet. I worked another 13-hour shift over the weekend, without a single break, looking after unwell children, unwell babies. I don’t mind doing that, it’s what I signed up for, but when the pay that we get is less than £20 pounds an hour for doing it, it’s just a smack in the face.”

Leeds Royal Infirmary

Dr Marie Tolan is a Specialist Trainee in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. She said, “Over the last five years since I qualified, plus the five years I was in medical school, I’ve really seen how things have taken a turn for the worse. We’re having to apologise to patients daily.

“Successive governments have failed to resolve this issue. We’ve been in dispute with both the Labour and the Conservative governments.

“Things just continue to get worse for our patients. I didn’t train to become a doctor to be stood on a picket line. I never thought I would be on a picket line. Unfortunately, for the last three years, I’ve been coming out, standing in the cold with my colleagues, because we are the canaries in the coal mine.

“The government has been trying to scaremonger to put doctors off taking strike action, but the NHS is lurching from crisis to crisis. We no longer just have a winter crisis, it’s a crisis all year round.”

The WSWs urges all resident doctors to contact NHS FightBack, which called for the rejection of Streeting’s insulting offer and outlined a strategy to end the isolation of their struggle through the formation of rank-and-file committees fighting for unity among the 1.4 million-strong NHS workforce.



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